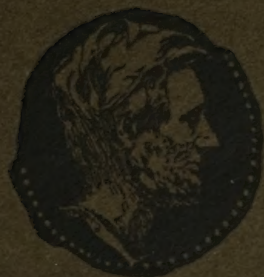


Passing the Torch



MARY RAYMOND SHIPMAN ANDREWS

Author of "The Perfect Tribute"

M2677

0.1535

M 2677

BY MARY R. S. ANDREWS

PASSING THE TORCH

JOY IN THE MORNING

THE ETERNAL FEMININE

AUGUST FIRST

THE ETERNAL MASCULINE

THE MILITANTS

BOB AND THE GUIDES

CROSSES OF WAR (Poems)

YELLOW BUTTERFLIES

HIS SOUL GOES MARCHING ON

HER COUNTRY

OLD GLORY

THE COUNSEL ASSIGNED

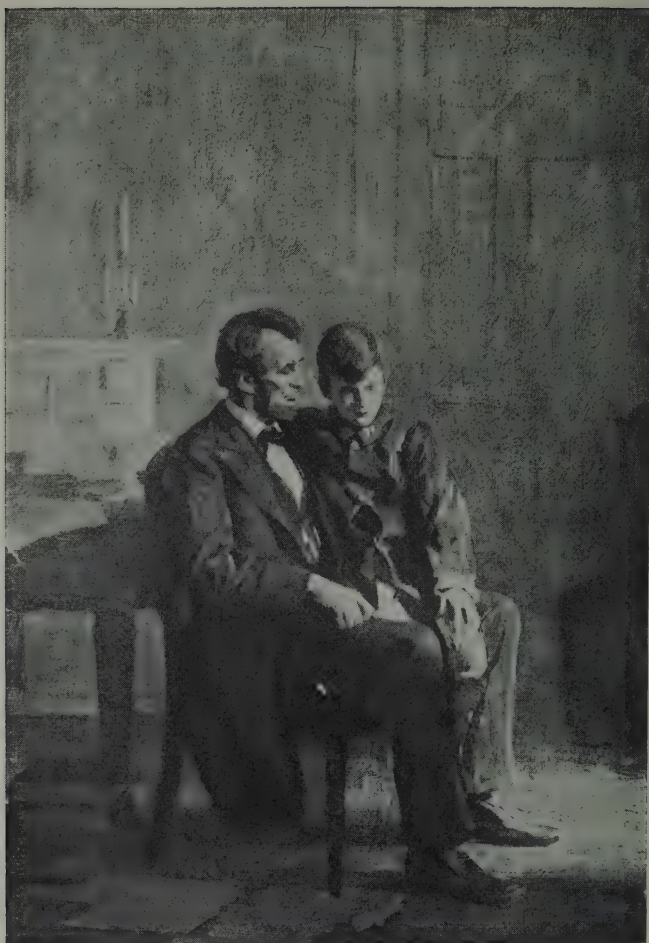
THE COURAGE OF THE COMMONPLACE

THE LIFTED BANDAGE

THE PERFECT TRIBUTE

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

PASSING THE TORCH



From a painting by Pruett Carter.

LINCOLN HAD DRAWN HIM TO HIS KNEE AS THEY TALKED.

PASSING THE TORCH

BY

Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews



NEW YORK

Charles Scribner's Sons

1924

COPYRIGHT, 1924, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

COPYRIGHT, 1924, BY CURTIS PUBLISHING CO.

Printed in the United States of America



PASSING THE TORCH

PASSING THE TORCH

1864. WAR TIME. MAY THE 13TH

THE dispatch-bearer was riding over to Belle Plain from Spottsylvania, in the Southern spring weather. Grant—with Hancock and Meade and Burnside and Upton and Warren and Sheridan and Wright, and more, commanding under him—had delivered his fourteen days' battle against the ill-shod, ill-clad, ill-fed, heroic forces of Lee. The mind of the rider was saturated with things which he had heard and seen. He had not taken part in that long struggle; Marye's Heights, at Fredericksburg, had seen his last fighting; twice that day as he tried to carry the flag up

PASSING THE TORCH

against the Confederate batteries he had been wounded, and the surgeons had labelled him "unfit for military service." But the high spirit of him could not bear to stop serving, so that now he was a dispatch-bearer. He had been on his way back from Washington during the late battle, and he was going again, from Grant, to make a report to the Secretary of War and to the President.

As he rode through the sunshine and shadow of the Southern country, passing marching troops, long lines of wagons, passing wrecked farmhouses and broken walls and woods shot to pieces, passing through Fredericksburg, immortalized by courage and suffering and glory, as he rode on toward the Potomac River his mind was concerned less with what he was

PASSING THE TORCH

doing than with what his comrades had just done. His report would be technical, dealing with military facts and figures, but he knew that Lincoln would want to hear other things, the human side. Indeed he knew Lincoln. A quickened pulse met that thought; he did know him, the gigantic personality which towered, weary and heavy laden, above a torn country; he knew him intimately. The young soldier was proud to be sure of that, proud and a little amazed to feel that what the great man gave him was more than friendship; it was affection. Smiling, with dreamy eyes, he felt again an arm warm around his shoulder as Lincoln walked beside him, only the other day. And now he was going back to the strong charm of that presence, a charm which no

PASSING THE TORCH

man who knew him ever failed to feel, which no man who felt it ever succeeded in putting into words. He was on his way back to Lincoln! The dispatch-bearer, only a youngster for all of his wounds and his battle-fields and his responsibility, kicked boyish heels into his horse's sides and broke into a gallop, whistling.

Later, his ride finished, he went aboard the night boat leaving Belle Plain at six o'clock for Washington; he took a stateroom, planning writing on the trip. A hungry lad after the long ride, his first thought was supper, and after that he strolled out on the deck, and immediately stopped to stare. Back of the wheel-house, in a tight corner, was a very little, very serious drummer boy, guarding, besides his own outfit, the accoutre-

PASSING THE TORCH

ments of an infantryman. Wing, the dispatch-bearer, looked at the child, wondering at his smallness and solemnity, but there was a dignity about the baby which made the young man hesitate to speak to him. He swung off down the deck, and around, and again—and then again—and at each passing he watched the boy in the corner.

Quiet evening light on the river thickened, grew misty, grew violet; it was dusk. At his next turn Wing, watching out of the corner of his eye, saw the little chap in the corner pull something that looked like a chip of a board out of his pocket; then, halting with a pretense of looking at the shore, he saw the child nibble at it. Hardtack. The boy had had no supper. That was too much for the warm heart of the young dispatch-

PASSING THE TORCH

bearer. He swung toward the wheel-house.

“Have you come far?”

The child stopped biting at his iron food and slipped it back into his pocket. “Not very, sir.” He touched his cap—a regulation drummer’s cap—in a salute. “Only from Spottsylvania. I stopped overnight at Fredericksburg.”

“You didn’t walk?”

“Yes, sir.” Gray, serious eyes with clear black edges to the irises glanced at the belongings of an infantryman lying by him, a rifle, cartridge-belt, knapsack, haversack, and canteen. It was as if he said: “The walking wasn’t bad. It was these things that were heavy.” And in fact they must have weighed almost what the lad did.

“You didn’t carry all that?”

PASSING THE TORCH

"Yes, sir." And then, in a lower voice: "They were my father's."

"Where's your father?" Instantly Wing repented the question. A quiver caught the tired little mouth, but he answered steadily:

"He's dead. He got killed in the battle. In the Bloody Angle. Day before yesterday."

The dispatch-bearer's hand shot out, covered the small, dirty hand of the child. "I'm sorry." The man said it simply but there was healing in the two words, for the gray eyes smiled up mistily.

"Lots of people have to get killed in war," the boy went on. It seemed to give him relief to talk to the dispatch-bearer. "Father said I wasn't to grieve if he was killed—but"—the soft little voice broke—"but I can't

PASSING THE TORCH

help—some.” The voice cleared pluckily. “Father said I was to go back home if—if he was—killed.”

“Where’s home?”

“Roddsville, Indiana. Father enlisted a year ago and left mother and me. She died last autumn—mother did. There wasn’t anybody more, so I went to the house after the funeral, and got my drum, and ran down to the railroad-station. I knew Mr. Hobbs, the conductor. Mr. Hobbs took me a long way when I said I was going to father. He gave me some lunch and some money, and he told the other, next conductor, and he passed me along. So I got to Washington. Then—I forget, but I found father’s regiment.”

The child was unconscious of having done anything extraordinary. Wing

PASSING THE TORCH

gazed at him dumbly, thinking of the tenacity of purpose in the slim body. And the child talked along.

“Father got me into the drum corps. I bunked with him. All winter. Near Culpeper. We broke camp a few weeks ago, and I just kept along with the regiment. It was nice, tapping off the marching, sir. Across Ely’s Ford to Chancellorsville, and back to the Wilderness, and then on—to—to Spottsylvania.” A sob choked him on “Spottsylvania.” “I can’t any more. Father’s dead. I can’t make the—the drumsticks sound—sound cheerful. Father said I was to go back to Indiana, so—They buried him yesterday, sir. In a trench. I watched. I picked up these”—he moved his head to the equipment—“and started.”

PASSING THE TORCH

"You must have lugged those things twenty miles."

"Yes, sir."

"And it was hot, and very dusty."

"Yes, sir."

The dispatch-bearer put a hand on the thin little shoulder. "The first move is to get you fed. Could you eat some supper, do you think?"

"Oh, *yes*, sir."

That night the bed in the comfortable stateroom did not hold its rightful proprietor; the small, worn-out body of the drummer boy stretched in it, and the child dropped at once into motionless, deep sleep. The dispatch-bearer, having borrowed a big chair, slept more or less at the boy's side, and in the morning they were in Washington. Hand in hand they went to the National Hotel and boy and

PASSING THE TORCH

man had bath and breakfast, and then Wing, with a busy forenoon ahead, must go out.

"I'm going to leave you here in the hotel," he told the child, "but I'll be back at twelve-thirty."

The gray, black-rimmed eyes had a look which stabbed. "Don't leave me," the forlorn little fellow pleaded. "Take me with you, sir. I won't be any trouble. I'll be quiet. I'll only just—be with you." The man took him.

The stairway of the White House, a broad flight of Joliet stone from the main floor to a landing where it divided, looked awe-inspiring to the little boy from Roddsville, Indiana. At the landing he slipped his hand into that of the dispatch-bearer, and clung to him as they took the steps to

PASSING THE TORCH

the east and made their way through the crowds in the upper hall. There were crowds in the anteroom also, important-looking men mostly, eager-eyed, nervous, restless, waiting to see the President. Lincoln never surrounded himself with barriers; one went to the White House, stated his affair, and awaited his turn merely. The child pushed close to his guardian in the anteroom, thrilled, in an unphrased, childish way, with the greatness of the occasion, and they too waited. Not long. Shortly a slim, boyish-looking young man came in, and his keen eyes gazed the company over. He saw Wing, and smiled, and crossed the room toward him.

“May I see the President, Mr. Hay?”

“He’ll want to see you,” answered

PASSING THE TORCH

the man who was to be later among the greatest, most honored of American statesmen, who was never to have in his brilliant career any experience as priceless to him as this secretaryship with Lincoln. He was gone a moment, and stepped back into the room, smiling again across it to the dispatch-bearer. "You're to go in at once." Wing and the child passed into a vestibule and the Secretary shut the door behind them and nodded toward another. "You know the way, Mr. Wing." He shook hands and hurried out at a side entrance.

Wing, the child clinging tight, rapped. Instantly a strong voice from inside shouted: "Come in," and as the door opened the President was striding to meet them.

"Well, young fellow, back again?"

PASSING THE TORCH

I'm glad to see you." A long arm went about the dispatch-bearer and he was led through the room. "Sit down by my desk. Why, who's this citizen?" asked Lincoln.

"He's a friend of mine, sir," said Wing, "who has a certain claim on the kindness of the nation. His father was killed fighting two days ago at Spottsylvania Court House. He's a very lonely little fellow and I took the liberty of bringing him along."

The furrows of the rough-hewn, sorrowful, spiritual face seemed to sink deeper; tenderness pervaded the entire big personality as the President laid his hand on the child's shoulder. "What a heap of trouble this war has made," spoke the President slowly. And then: "Sit down, Wing. Sit down, sonny, and tell me all about it.

PASSING THE TORCH

First, however, Mr. Wing, your report of this battle?"

For fifteen minutes or more the two men talked and the child waited. Never in his life was the child to forget those moments of waiting. A strong light filled the Cabinet room where they were, through great south windows. Outside he could see the Potomac River in bright sunshine. The President sat at a long table, sometimes with one leg thrown over a corner of it. The light brought out the lines in the haggard and careworn face. His right cuff had been taken off to sign papers more easily. His black frock coat was wrinkled and shiny, and one end of his necktie was caught under the corner of the collar—yet somehow he did not look untidy.

PASSING THE TORCH

With a wide gesture at last as if slipping the whole terrible business from his mind Lincoln turned to the child, sitting silent, serious, in a high office chair, his feet, in worn boots, dangling above the floor. Wing in a few words told how he had found and mothered the waif, and then Lincoln turned to the waif himself. As the hazel rod of tradition shows where springs of water lie underground, so by an instinct of childhood, responding unfailingly to springs of goodness and reality in humanity—by such an instinct the lad opened his soul to Lincoln. The details of the pitiful little story emerged one by one unashamed, and Lincoln listened and led him on. The little chap had come nearer to him, and Lincoln had drawn him to his knee as they talked,

PASSING THE TORCH

the President questioning, the child answering freely, each absorbed in the other, the head of the nation, withdrawing for this moment from a whirlpool of tremendous matters, not less genuinely interested than the homeless drummer boy.

With that there was a crash and a scramble at the other end of the room and the President, putting the child away quickly, turned anxiously. Tad, his own boy of about the same age as the little drummer, had been playing there unnoticed and had fallen off a stool. "Come here, Tad," called Lincoln, assured that his child was unhurt. "I want to introduce you to this soldier."

Tad came. The two boys, stiff and shy as is the way of boys, being prompted, shook hands limply and

PASSING THE TORCH

stared, interested but awkward as two young animals going through an unaccustomed trick. Then the boy of the White House went slowly back to his playground behind the big furniture of his father's office. The President watched him go.

"Tad has been sick," he said. "It has worried me." He put his hands either side of his great head and, leaning on his elbows, stared down at the table. "No man ought to wish to be President of the United States," said Lincoln. His face grew infinitely sad. "This child," he talked on as if to himself, "just about Tad's age, working his way, friendless, homeless— And I'm so anxious about my Tad. If Tad had died—" It was as if a seizure of depression had taken hold of him and he were fighting to overcome it. Abruptly he straight-

PASSING THE TORCH

ened in his chair and caught the little drummer's hand, drawing him again to his knee. "What are we going to do with this child?" he asked the dispatch-bearer, and the way he said "we" made it plain that whatever was done the President of the United States would be concerned in the doing.

"I must go back this afternoon, sir," spoke the young dispatch-bearer, troubled.

"And the child must be left in safe hands," said Lincoln. "I suppose it's the Christian Commission."

"I suppose so, sir," agreed Wing, a trifle reluctantly. The Christian Commission seemed a bit impersonal and cold for the little, affectionate, vivid personality which Wing had already begun to love.

A knock at the door; young Hay,

PASSING THE TORCH

the Secretary, stood there. "May Senator Colbaith see you for one moment, Mr. President? He says only for a moment."

"Yes. Stay here," he commanded Wing, and kept the boy on his knee.

The Senator came in, quiet, high-bred, keen-witted, with an eye of friendliness and of humor. "I'm sorry to interrupt," he began, and glanced at the child resting comfortably against the President's broad shoulder. "And with so young an office-seeker also. His case seems to be coming on well," smiled the Senator.

"I hope it may," Lincoln answered, and in a few laconic sentences sketched the child's history. Colbaith listened, and one might see that the tale stirred him. "Queer thing, life," he said, when the Presi-

PASSING THE TORCH

dent had made an end of speaking. "The irony of it! On one side my wife and I who have longed in vain for a child; on the other a boy going begging; no one to own him, no place for him in the world."

Lincoln looked up sharply. "Why not tie the hanging ends together? Put the loose horse in the empty stall. Take this boy home to your wife. I know Mrs. Colbaith and I believe she would welcome and mother him. Will you?"

Colbaith was startled. "That's rather a large question to answer suddenly, Mr. President," he spoke.

Lincoln set the boy from him and rose and walked, his hands clasped behind him, to the great south window, where he stood, a lank, gaunt, melancholy figure, blocking the danc-

PASSING THE TORCH

ing spring sunlight. There was silence in the Cabinet room; Senator Colbaith, the dispatch-bearer, and the drummer boy all waited for the leading of that great presence. A moment he stood so, gazing out, and wheeled and came back. He came to the boy and, putting his big fingers under the round chin, he lifted the small face.

"Listen, sonny," spoke Lincoln. "A man told me a story a while ago. He said that on one of the earlier days of the Spottsylvania battle General Grant was sitting on a fallen tree writing a dispatch and a corps of drummers passed and suddenly struck up a negro camp-meeting air, and everybody around laughed. Grant doesn't know but two tunes, and one of 'em's Yankee Doodle and the other isn't, so he asked: 'What's

PASSING THE TORCH

the joke?' Rawlins explained that the boys were playing 'Ain't I glad to get out ob de wilderness?' Do you know anything about that, sonny?"

For the first time the child smiled. "Yes, sir, Mr. President." Then, shyly but proudly: "I was there. It was me told 'em to play it."

"Oh! 'It was me,'" repeated Lincoln. "I thought maybe." He turned to Colbaith and his hand dropped to the boy's shoulder. "He's not stupid," the President stated to Colbaith. "Sonny," he went on, "this gentleman, Senator Colbaith, owns a farm—which is what Tad and I are going to do sometime. And this farm is up in New England in such poor country that they have to sharpen the noses of the sheep to get 'em down to nibble the grass between the rocks.

PASSING THE TORCH

What do you think of that, sonny?"

The serious gray eyes widened a second, and then in a flash a peal of young laughter poured out through the grave room with its staid, heavy atmosphere, and little Tad Lincoln from his corner behind the sofa stood up and laughed too in a sudden shout. And then the President laughed to hear the children, and the others, Colbaith and Wing, caught the infection. Lincoln stopped in a moment.

"That does me good," he said, and his face lighted with pleasure as he turned to Colbaith. "By jings, the boy can laugh," he said. "I love laughter, Colbaith," said Lincoln. "This child's not stupid, and he can laugh, and he's tenacious and trustworthy—you've heard his story. It's

PASSING THE TORCH

a good deal of a foundation for a character. A thoughtful man could build a fine structure on that foundation."

Colbaith, sobering swiftly, stood a moment lost in thought. Finally he came over to where the little fellow leaned, half lost in the encircling arm of the President. "Would you like to go home to Boston with me to-night, my child?" he asked, looking down from his keen, smiling eyes. "For a visit? Two weeks—a month? We'll be good to you, and—and if we all pull together, well—there's no telling what might happen."

The boy glanced up inquiringly to the face towering high above him; back to Colbaith. "May I take my drum?"

"Yes."

PASSING THE TORCH

“And—my father’s things?”

“Yes, my dear.”

“If Mr. President says so I’d love to go.”

“Colbaith,” spoke Lincoln, and the deep-set, keen, visionary eyes glowed, melted—“Colbaith, the Deity may have better deeds on his list than being kind to the fatherless in his affliction—but I don’t know ’em.” He took the small fingers of the drummer boy in one hand and in the other grasped Colbaith’s and brought the two together with a will. “Whom the flag of America has joined,” spoke Lincoln, “let no man put asunder.”

A November afternoon of the year 1920. New York City. On the nineteenth floor of the Sterling Building, Frederick Hope Hale’s magnificent

PASSING THE TORCH

offices. Room after room of clerks, stenographers, typewriting machines, and at last the big, luxurious, private room of the great man himself. An open, crackling wood fire, Oriental rugs in dim, glowing colors; an enormous carved desk of dark oak; oak chairs sending back dusky lights from twisted sides; the master himself, for the moment deep in a massive stuffed armchair, talking to Richard M. G. Latham, Esq. No youngsters, these two friends; between them they might count one hundred and thirty-seven years; Hale's grizzled head and Latham's white one, and the lined faces of both told the tale of time honestly. Yet they were anything but the decrepit remnants which are commonly cast for near-seventy-year-old parts. Hale

PASSING THE TORCH

was sixty-eight; Latham a year or so more. Both were carefully dressed and groomed. Both had the leanness and easy movement which come from lifelong, systematic athletics; each rode a horse, played golf, shot big game, climbed mountains, swam; maybe thousands of men in America do the same at the same age and later, to-day. Latham was slight and small, a bachelor, a club-man, but also a philanthropist; his large fortune was an inheritance. Hale was six feet two and powerfully built, a multi-millionaire of perhaps the second flight of millionaires, and still making theatrical sums of money all the time; a power in finance to-day more than in his fiftieth year. Latham talked along serenely, twisting the toe of his shining shoe and watching it twist with interest as he talked.

PASSING THE TORCH

"And so you see, Freddy, the gay old girl is going to hand over a cool five thousand for the veterans' camp, and all because I told her that her earrings matched the wicked green lights in her eyes. I'm a good little palaverer, Freddy; don't you forget it."

"I won't," Hale growled, unsmiling. "I'll remember, and look out for you."

Latham sobered suddenly. "Don't get too literal, old chap. I may want to hold you up any minute. Lots of people need, badly, the things your extra dollars could do. It's a power, dollars." He put the clouded amber top of his cane against his lips thoughtfully. "For years, Freddy, you were a prince of generosity. I don't make you out lately, old man, I'll say frankly. You turned down the

PASSING THE TORCH

A. F. P. W. Why? I'm impertinent, I know, but we saved up our allowances together at Yale for the community saddle-horse—remember, Freddy? So if I can't be impertinent, who can? Now I *am* going to hold you—hey?"

A knock at the door.

"Come in," growled Hale.

Creighton, Hale's private secretary, stood there, and it did not need old acquaintance to see that he was agitated. "I'd like to go, Mr. Hale. I'm—I'm going home," Creighton blurted with un-Creighton-esque lack of suavity and deference.

"Anything wrong, Creighton?"

"Yes. Yes. My boy. He's been hurt. I don't know how much. Driving—driving his car. I—I'm going," stammered Creighton. "Collins will

PASSING THE TORCH

see to the paper for McCord, Dunn & White. I'm sorry," stammered Creighton.

"Surely. Don't give it a thought. I hope you'll find the boy safe," Hale said, and Creighton, trying to answer "thank you," twisted his mouth into an inarticulate bleat, bit his twisting lips, wheeled, and left precipitately.

Hale's eyes narrowed as he gazed at the closed door. "Children!" he said. "Give me dogs. With dogs you know where you stand, and you stand in the centre of their being. As long as their being lasts. You throw 'em a crust of affection and you get back 'love unswerving that cannot die.' A dog's trustworthy. But children— Oh, my word, a child! Look at Creighton. That boy's the universe to Creighton. If he dies it will leave his

PASSING THE TORCH

father and mother crushed till their death; if he lives, likely at twenty-odd he'll bring home some girl whom they can't endure, a chorus girl or a deadly bore—one's as bad as the other—without even consulting them. Creighton and his wife have sacrificed a lot to that boy. It's the way it goes. You spend your strength and time and heart's blood on a child and he kicks you out of his life as soon as he doesn't need you." Hale brought his fist down on his desk. "But Brock didn't succeed. I'm not to be done so almighty easily by a raw youngster. I didn't accept Brock's wife. From that day I had no son. Give me dogs!" His face was dark red with emotion. His big hand shook.

"Don't stir the old ashes, Fred,"

PASSING THE TORCH

Latham urged. "You hurt yourself; you do, indeed. Brock, poor Brock is dead these six years. It's past."

Hale's head dropped and his hands played limply with a paper-cutter. "Past," he repeated. He looked up with desperation in his eyes. "I suppose that's it, Dick. Past. As long as Brock lived there was a dim hope that he'd come back—say he was wrong—give up the woman. He never really loved her. But Brock's dead—six years now—nothing personal left for me in this damned dull world. Except making money. Money!" He laughed. "What do I want with more money?"

Latham was still a moment. Then: "You've had a hard row to hoe, Fred. But your money—"

"But nothing," Hale flung at him.

PASSING THE TORCH

"I've been—twice—knocked on the head with an axe. You're the only human I've ever spoken to about my wife. You know if I—adored her." His voice was husky. "Thank God she's dead. You know what she did. I thought I'd shoot myself the first day. But I had the boy. I turned all that—adoration—to him. Every breath I drew was for Brock. I staggered back to a certain happiness. I was proud of him. Handsome fellow, winning fellow, such a big, upstanding fellow at sixteen. A bit uncertain, unreliable—I thought he'd outgrow that. We were playmates. I trusted him. I'll never trust anything else—that's young. Youth means solid selfishness. Yes, *always*. Don't argue, Dick. I've been through this mill. I know. Brock kicked me out of his

PASSING THE TORCH

life; left me without a shred to hang to—of human affection. You know how it was — telegraphed — *telegraphed* that he'd married this cheap person. Telegraphed! I wonder I didn't drop in my tracks. It might have been better if it had killed me. No—then the she-devil would have had my money. I'd have turned in my grave. I saw her once, you know—at his funeral. Loud, dissipated. Frankly hated me, but tried to get money. As her right! *Her* right. Brock was only twenty miles from Indian Hall—from his own home—when the motor crashed. Twenty miles. And hadn't come near me. He used to be—always wanting—to be with me. Sometimes I can't believe it happened. So out of drawing—my Brock."

PASSING THE TORCH

"I've always believed," Latham put in quietly, "that Brock was on his way to you."

Hale shook his head. "Not he. I hoped that at first, but she—or some one—would have said so."

"Wasn't there a child?"

Hale's dreary gaze did not flicker from the paper-knife. "I think she said so," he answered without interest. "I let her speak hardly a dozen words. She began by saying she had a right to my money. I left about then."

"Brock's child," said Latham.

"That woman's child," Hale corrected him. "I want nothing to do with a child of hers and of—the man who kicked me out." He roused himself. "Forgive me, Dick. I'm unloading my troubles on you. Do forgive

PASSING THE TORCH

me. To-day I'm down. It's—" he hesitated—"it's Brock's birthday."

"Fred, I came in to ask you for something," Latham spoke, "and I want you to do it—for Brock's birthday. For the old Brock who brought you joy for twenty-four years. Forget the rest. Be big-minded. Forget yourself; remember only the boy you loved and the power you have to do good."

"What do you want?"

"I want your check for fifty thousand dollars for the drive for the Children's Hospital."

"Damn!" Hale's head shot up and his eyes flashed and his fist made the table shake. "Damnation, no! *No!* Not fifty cents. I hate the human race—except for two or three old codgers like yourself whom I can't hate. Even when you do a fool thing

PASSING THE TORCH

like asking money for charity. You know well enough I don't give away money—to charity especially. I only throw it away. That's my diversion, and it's my money. It's my best amusement to make 'em sweat to get it and then fool 'em. I haven't given one cent since—since Brock died. And I detest children. Let 'em die. Let the race die out. It's a failure. I'll not lift a finger to keep it going."

"God forgive you, Fred, you're a liar." Latham was on his feet. "You don't believe what you're saying. You're not built that way. It's a hideous lie to yourself. You're more than a touch insane at this moment, man. You know what the papers are saying?"

Hale laughed. "Of course I know.

PASSING THE TORCH

I like it. Don't you suppose I enjoy spending one hundred thousand dollars for a picture and refusing a penny to charity? I like to see 'em stew, the bromide lot. They call me a miser. I like it, I tell you. I sent a twenty-five-thousand-dollar check to-day to the French Theatre. I'll play tag with millions, as the papers say, because it amuses me, but I'll be damned if I'll be philanthropic to a world that has knocked me into hell."

Latham fixed eyes of burning indignation on the other. "Fred," he said, "I've loved you forty years and I don't know how to stop or I would. I'm deeply—disgusted with you. Taking it out on a bunch of lame babies. Shame on you! My only comfort is that you're really a bit dotty, and not responsible. You may be

PASSING THE TORCH

cured. If I thought you had warped into this venomous machine of blind revenge—if I thought the man just now talking was actually you I'd—" Latham's voice faltered and he stared at the big figure tense in his chair. He went on; his tone broke a little. "God, Fred, even if you were lost to decency like that I'd love you still."

Hale put out shaking fingers. "Don't go back on me, Dick—don't you go back on me, Dick," he begged. "I'm a drowning man, and maybe you're my straw."

"Heaven send you a better one," Latham spoke fervently. He covered the hand held to him with both his own; he whirled about, and was gone.

Hale sat on in the waning November light, motionless, his face as hard as cast iron. Almost as gray. For ten,

PASSING THE TORCH

fifteen minutes he did not stir; then a knock at the door sounded gently. "Come," he spoke mechanically, and drew some papers toward him and picked up his fountain pen. A clerk came in.

"Shall I switch on lights, sir?"

"Yes."

Hale turned a glance to the window. He had not noticed the darkness. The clerk bustled a bit and stood hesitating. "What is it, Morgan?"

"I'm sorry to trouble you, but—I'm uncertain what to do. There's a child; he's very insistent."

"A child," Hale repeated. "What child? Who's with him?"

"No one, Mr. Hale. A young boy about twelve. Very—shabby, sir. He says he's walked from Wisconsin to see you."

PASSING THE TORCH

“From Wisconsin—walked !” Some caprice, some loneliness, an unreasoned tilt of the tortured gray matter of his brain moved Hale. “Send him in.”

The boy stood in the doorway, a shabby thing indeed, a long-legged little figure in torn clothes, hat in hand. He stepped forward eagerly, but stopped. Morgan, the clerk, closed the door quietly. The two were alone, the well-set-up, powerful, perfectly dressed plutocrat of sixty-eight, and the forlorn little scarecrow of a lad, an old coat, sizes too large, sagging about his bones, short trousers torn at the knee, stockings mended grotesquely with light-colored thread. Hale’s eyes missed nothing; they saw also that the child’s face and hands were clean. There

PASSING THE TORCH

was no apology in his bearing; he stood before this great personage with his head up as if he were perhaps a messenger come from a greater personage.

"Well!" said Hale.

"Good afternoon, sir," answered the boy politely.

"You want to see me," Hale shot out, "about something important?" Men who had not clearly defined statements to set forth were likely to quake when Hale flung his challenge in that vigorous tone. The boy did not quake. He walked across the floor quite deliberately and stood four feet away.

"Yes, sir," he spoke with a grave courtesy, with no sign of shyness and with no sign of boldness. "I do want to see you. It's important."

PASSING THE TORCH

"State your business," commanded Hale. "And do it briefly. My time's valuable." Already his sick mind regretted the effort of this interview. Yet there was something about the child oddly interesting. Hale suddenly noticed that his face was colorless and that he swayed as he stood. "You may sit down." It happened to be a rather high office chair, and the boy's broken shoes, with a piece of muddy leather hanging loose, dangled. His feet did not reach the floor. It was queer that those wretched shoes with worn laces knotted to hold them, those shoes that did not reach the floor, should send discomfort into Hale. He turned his eyes from them.

"Well," he spoke again sharply, "if you wish something of me, say it. Money?"

PASSING THE TORCH

The gray, serious glance of the boy met his.

"No, sir," he answered with a slight lift of his head, and the man noticed that it was a handsome head, set well back on the slender shoulders, which gave it an air of pride. "No, sir, I don't want any money, thank you. But it's about your money that I've come to see you."

"About my money? What have you to do with my money?"

"Well, sir, I've come an awfly long way because there doesn't seem to be anybody else to tell you, and you *must* be told that you are burying your talents."

Hale was dumb. He stared at the boy, and the boy, undisturbed by his savage stare, went on: "You know, sir, the parable of the talents in the

PASSING THE TORCH

Bible? How the horse-holder—I suppose he kept a livery-stable, sir, don't you?—how he was going off on a trip and he telephoned for his hands. And he gave one of 'em five talents—that's money, sir. And another man he gave two talents and another one. And he told 'em to look sharp and keep the shop going, and make some money while he was gone. You know that parable, don't you, sir? I think it was trusting servants quite a lot myself—they're such an untrustable sort these days." He shook his head wisely. "But he did it, the Bible says. And the five-talent man and the two-talent man did their darndest and made money, and the horse-holder said 'Good for you,' when he came back, but the man with one talent, he'd chucked his into the

PASSING THE TORCH

ground and buried it, and he said to the horse-holder, 'You're a mean sort, and here's your money and you can't say anything to me, for it's as good as new and all what you gave me.' But that didn't go, sir. No. It was the man's job to do something with that money, not to bury it." One dangling foot, in its muddy old boot, hooked itself on the rung of the chair, and the boy leaned forward and lifted an emphatic finger at Hale. Hale gazed, amazed. "Now that story, sir, that's what's called a—a parable. That means a kind of story that means something else. And you see, sir, it's to say that when you have a thing that is valuable you must do worth-while things with it, and not just play with it or leave it to lie. You're bound to do good

PASSING THE TORCH

things with good money—that's what that parable of the talents means, sir. My grandmother explained it to me, you see, the very day before she died, and as it was the last thing she and I talked about, I've thought about it. Oh, quite a lot since. I always read everything in the papers about you, sir, of course, and I could see awfly plainly that you were burying your talents. All the papers said you weren't doing any good"—the lad's head moved regretfully from side to side—"with your money—and your power, and it did seem too bad. *I* know how kind and wonderful and clever you really are, and I hated to see you burying your talents. Because you've got five. It's awfly bad to bury five. I knew there was nobody to tell you about it, and

PASSING THE TORCH

I thought prob'bly your grandmother was dead, so it was up to me to tell you. So I came."

Hale, out of depths of astonishment, found words. "Are you preaching a crusade to the financiers of this country?" he inquired. The boy looked at him courteously, puzzled. "I mean, have you made it your business to go about to all the rich men of the land and tell them where to get off—that is, what you consider their duty?"

"Oh, *no!*" For the first time the boy smiled, and something in the young smile hit Hale. He caught his breath. It was merely a flash of expression, sweet, boyish, light-hearted. But how did *this* boy happen to smile *that* way? "Oh, no," the boy assured him. "Of course, not all the rich men.

PASSING THE TORCH

Only you. I'm responsible for you, you see." He smiled again, and again his look bewildered, stabbed Hale.

"Responsible—for—" Hale stammered. "What do you mean? What boy are you? What's your name?"

"Frederick Hope Hale 2d," stated the boy simply. It had not occurred to him that the man did not know his name.

There was silence in the big office. Frederick Hope Hale's eyes, narrowed to a line of gray light, scrutinized every line of Frederick Hope Hale 2d's bony body, from the bronze hair and erect head down through the no-color flannel shirt and the too-large coat drawn together over that dubious shirt and pinned hopefully behind a lapel with a huge safety-pin which showed, flamboyant; down

PASSING THE TORCH

over the shabby, shabby trousers to the pathetic darn in the old stockings; a boy's idea of a darn. At last the keen, hard eyes rested on the one dangling foot and its mate hooked by the heel to the chair-rung, two feet in muddy old shoes open to the light. Brock's boy. And Brock had named his boy for his father. For him.

Some interior part of his anatomy appeared to Hale to be leaping into unexpected evidence, to be getting into the way of his breathing. The sensation was for a second wholly physical. For another second he felt edges going soft, as if he were after all made of wax, and a sudden great warmth had been directed to him. Brock's boy—handsome, erect head, bronze hair; the smile—Brock's familiar smile. Brock's boy—cracked

PASSING THE TORCH

boots, with mud unsuccessfully scraped away; an evident pitiful attempt to make himself presentable—the stocking he had tried to darn, the safety-pin showing aggressively where clumsy young fingers had worked to hide it. The coat was sizes too big; somebody had given Brock's boy an old coat out of charity. A tide of emotion was storming fiercely up through the man's veins, and suddenly he was aware of it, and caught it, choked it as one might choke off the nozzle of a hose through which pours a stream of water fit to knock a man over. With an effort, a wrench of will, he turned off the stream. Yes, Brock's boy—and what had Brock done that his boy should be anything to Frederick Hope Hale? Moreover, this was the woman's boy, the

PASSING THE TORCH

woman's who had smashed his life.

"So you're Brock's offspring?" He said it with a cold bitterness lost to the child. The child was not alive to subtleties of unkindness. His gray eyes with black rims around the irises, eyes like those other older ones, with a world of difference, met Hale's hard gaze unembarrassed.

"Yes, sir," he said, "that was my father's name. But I was awfully young, I wasn't but six when he died. I don't remember him much."

"What did you come here for?" The man flung it out furiously. "My money?"

Frederick Hope Hale 2d took that as a seeking of information by one gentleman from another. He shook his head. "Nope," he responded. "I

PASSING THE TORCH

didn't think about that. I came like I said. It was up to me."

"Nonsense," said Hale sharply. "Somebody sent you to get money. Who? Your mother?" The keen look searched the boy.

"Mother?" It was a tone of unchildlike sadness. The corner of his mouth trembled a little. He shook his head. "No, sir. I haven't seen mother in two years. Not since grandmother died. She's west, acting, mother is. I think. She—well you see—" The lad drew in his breath as if he were going to dive into deep water. "You see," he explained, "mother doesn't like me. She—she says I'm so big I make her feel old, and—and she said she didn't like the sort of boy I am, anyway. She likes 'em funny and gay and playing a lot.

PASSING THE TORCH

I'm not funny, sir, and I've never had a good chance to play. I lived with my grandmother since I was young, and there was work after school because grandmother mostly was sick. I washed the dishes and did the housework. But grandmother used to read to me evenings, and I liked that, and in the summer we'd go away out on a trolley and take our supper, and I just love the country, don't you, sir? It was nice, and I had a home when grandmother lived. She was awfly kind, and she wouldn't let mother get me."

"Get" him! His mother!

"But you didn't play with the other boys?" asked the hard voice from the big chair.

Frederick Hope Hale 2d did not notice that the voice was hard. "Oh,

PASSING THE TORCH

I couldn't. Not often." He shook his head. "Too much to do. I sold papers. I was awfly busy."

"What sort of things did your grandmother read to you? Henty, I suppose? Magazine stories? *Ladies' Monthly*, and such?"

"Well, no," considered the boy. "We used to get books out of the library, and most of 'em seemed to turn out American histories. Once there was a story by a man named Mr. Walter Scott. 'Ivanhoe.' But it wasn't Mr. Scott. It was Sir Scott. A peach of a story. About knights and fighting and what-you-may-call-'em—tournaments. You ought to read that book, sir. You'd enjoy it. And then, of course, there was the Bible. Every single night. There's some good fights in the Bible," re-

PASSING THE TORCH

flected the boy. "David, you know. He was a good scout. Stories too—hunks of 'em. Some of 'em bully."

"That accounts for your serious diction," remarked Hale.

"Huh?" inquired the boy. "I mean, what, sir?" But his face was swept with the pleasure of turning over and bringing into light the few bright-colored pages among his small, sombre memories. "Well, the Bible's a fair book, not so good as Sir Scott maybe, but it's interesting. And good for the soul, grandmother said. And there was the life of Washington, and the story of the American Revolution we read and—"

"Good Lord," groaned Hale. "Your grandmother had odd tastes for the mother of your mother."

"Huh?" asked the boy again, and

PASSING THE TORCH

rambled on. "Did you ever read the life of Abraham Lincoln, sir? That's fine. Wasn't Lincoln a peach?"

Hale straightened sharply in his chair. From away in the misty past, out of the shifting sands of nearly sixty years, an unforgotten scene emerged as clear-cut as if it had happened last week. There had been, those years ago, a tall man in a large office room, a small, lonely boy who dangled feet from a chair and told his story. And the boy had looked out of honest gray eyes such as this boy's; he had been sad, poor, alone, and of a courage, as was this boy. God! Hale had nearly forgotten that scene. In the bitterness of late years he had nearly forgotten; in casting up his accounts with life he had somehow made out that he owed life nothing

PASSING THE TORCH

but hate—and yet life had given him, at the very start, that day, and the fairy-story which followed. Abraham Lincoln ! Before his eyes, almost lifelike, almost real, rose a picture of the room in the White House and of those men in it who had taken his forlorn young being and shaped it and started it among them to success and honor. The dispatch-bearer, Mr. Wing, slender, dark, with brilliant black eyes, who had come to him on the boat where he watched his dead father's equipment, hungry and alone, who had "mothered" him and been good to him and treated him as the Son of God might have treated a poor waif; then Lincoln, the towering personality which was yet always at the level of humanity, whose great best was forever at the service of the

PASSING THE TORCH

poorest of mankind, Lincoln who had given time and strength from his strenuous day to the bit of flotsam driven on his beach; then—his second father! Colbaith the senator, who had taken him to his own home, made him his son, given him love and opportunity and a future which had blossomed into a great career. In a flash, as Hale's inner vision saw the scene and the three men who had moulded his life, he saw more. Infinitely more. As sometimes happens to most of us, the black veil which had choked and darkened his days, the veil woven by his own hands, was rent in twain, and through the opening flowed light. There *were* trustworthy people on earth; it was as sure as living that these three men, Lincoln, Wing, Colbaith, were that.

PASSING THE TORCH

The world was in the main good, faithful.

Scientists say that no atom of matter is ever lost, that the most infinitesimal goes through change after change into some other substance, carrying on its eternal work as a part, this atom also, of the universe. It is appalling to believe that no more does any breath of life go to waste, and that each act of each of us leaves its undying trail. The friendship we bring, the enmity we bring, is never to end. If one is merely a bore that takes the joy out of living. God forgive the bores! If one says "good morning" cheerfully that makes for joy. The responsibility of it is hideous; lucky that no one ever stops to realize such responsibilities, for they multiply faster than armies of rab-

PASSING THE TORCH

bits. All the good we do, that also, thank heaven, is not "interred with our bones," for all of Shakespeare. One great life leavens generations. There are some alive who knew Lincoln; there are thousands influenced by lives which touched his; there are probably millions who have read his words and been better. "Wasn't Lincoln a peach?" asked the boy, quite unconscious that fifty years before his birth his fate and his father's and his grandfather's had been shaped in a half hour wrung from Lincoln's hard-pressed days. "Wasn't Lincoln a peach?" demanded the boy happily, and the mere name stripped the husks of bitterness from Hale's soul. The flame of the name left the soul bare to the stream of memory. Lincoln—a man of sorrows and acquaint-

PASSING THE TORCH

ed with grief; who had known loss and disappointment and ingratitude and humiliation; who had held fast to the love of humanity. Like a torrent of pelting, strong rain, stinging, cleansing, the memory of how Lincoln had faced his life and of how he, Hale, had shrunk from his, whipped that bare soul of Hale. In time. Through the rent which Lincoln's name tore in his misery he saw his own affair set before him in simple terms. Brock, his beloved, had done wrong, but was yet Brock. With a stab of joy it came to him that Brock was surely on the way to him when he was killed. He knew it. Why hadn't he known it before? It couldn't be otherwise. The wife was a poor twisted soul—he would forgive her, he would try to help her. What debt of honor

PASSING THE TORCH

could be more compelling than to hand down the loving-kindness of Lincoln which had directed his career? To pass the torch; to give, as his span in the race grew shorter, a flame into the hand of the next runner. The next runner—this lad, this darling lad! Why, this lad was half Brock and half himself, and the Lord had sent a pious grandmother to save him from his mother. And he was saved! Glory be, he was saved. It was as fine a bit of boy material as one would wish, needing only hope and happiness to blossom into splendid manhood. Just as Hale himself had needed such things that morning in the White House sixty years ago. This boy! Was it possible Hale was going to have something to love again?

PASSING THE TORCH

The boy stood up. Hale noticed that he limped a little as he came toward him. "Good-by, sir," he said, and held out his hand.

Hale did not take it.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, startled. "'Good-by'—what do you mean?"

"I'm going to start back to Wisconsin to-morrow. There's a man said if I'd chop some wood for him to-night he'd give me supper and I could sleep in his garage. I mustn't be late, you see. And I'm a little hungry. I didn't— And—my shoes hurt, just a little. You'll remember about the talents, sir? I think you'll remember, because I walked mostly from Wisconsin to remind you. Good-by." The puppy-big, bony young hand was held out again.

PASSING THE TORCH

But Hale fastened on a word in the lad's speech. "Hungry!" spoke Hale. "My God!" Then: "You didn't have—lunch? Why didn't you have lunch?"

The boy smiled. "That's nothing. I don't need so awfly much to eat. I had two cups of coffee this morning. Awfly nice lady this side of Yonkers. She let me sleep in her garage, and this morning she gave me a cup of coffee, and when I drank it fast she said: 'Want another?' Nice of her, wasn't it? And a quarter for car fare. But I only used ten cents. I may need the rest, you see."

"Where did you get dinner last night—supper?"

"Oh, I had a hardtack left last night, and I ate it in the garage."

Hale put out one hand and pulled a

PASSING THE TORCH

chair close; with the other he shoved the boy into it. And he held to the boy's hand. "Listen, Frederick Hope Hale 2d," he said. "You belong to me."

The gray eyes regarded him inquiringly.

Hale went on. "I haven't any illusions," he went on as if he addressed, perhaps, Latham. "I know the chances are that I'll set my heart on you and spend my strength on you and focus my life on you, and that when you're twenty-odd you'll kick me out of your scheme of things and go your own damned way. I'm facing that."

The gray eyes lighted. "I don't understand 'zactly what you're talking about, sir, but *I'd* never kick *you* out. Never," he stated. And Hale, grop-

PASSING THE TORCH

ing into the young personality, felt again trustworthiness; a trustworthiness which he had never touched in Brock.

“You wouldn’t?” asked Hale huskily. “Bless you for saying it, anyhow. Now, look here.” The hand he held stirred a little, comfortably, in his clasp. The contact thrilled him. “Now, look here,” he began again. “I’m lonely and you’re lonely, and we rightfully belong to each other. I may be a fool, but I’m going to keep you. You’re going to be my boy, and if you grow up and knock out the bottom of things as it happened once before—well, I’ll be due to die then, and I’ll have had you anyhow. I’m doing this, mind you, partly for your sake, and a whole lot for my own, but also very much for the sake of a debt

PASSING THE TORCH

I've owed for sixty years to—Abraham Lincoln. To—to pass the torch."

The boy's brows drew into a puzzled look. "I don't 'zactly understand," he said. And then, politely: "Is it a parable?"

Hale threw back his head and shouted a laugh which made the demure clerks in the outer office lift their heads and stare. And the boy was on his feet again.

"I mustn't forget grandmother's message. She said, over and over, I was to tell you when I saw you that my father was coming to see you when he was killed. Mother didn't want you to know, but grandmother said you ought to." The lad did not pause for the look in Hale's face. He went on hurriedly. "I'm sorry to go,

PASSING THE TORCH

sir. It's late. I've to chop that wood for Mr. Ferris."

"Have you Mr. Ferris's address?"

A scrap of brown paper came out of the pocket of the large coat. "381 East 187th Street. It's about out in the country. I think I'll have to spend five cents for car fare." He looked anxious.

"My car's down-stairs," stated Hale, watching the boy's face. "I'll take you to 187th Street, and I'll explain that you're dining with me to-night instead of chopping Mr. Ferris's wood; that you're sleeping in—in your father's bed instead of in a garage."

The young face flashed. "That *would* be bully," he said. "But I can't. Nope. You see, he's depending on me to get the wood chopped."

PASSING THE TORCH

Hale considered him. "You'd better come; I'll give you—turkey and ice-cream."

"Gosh!" The gray eyes blinked as if dazzled, then stretched wide. He smacked his lips. "Oh, gee! But I said I'd come. I've to keep my word, you see?"

Hale's mouth set. "Now look here. I'll give Mr. Ferris—say ten dollars to find a man to do your work. How about that?"

"Ten—dollars! Oh, gosh! Oh, gee! That's awfly ex-extravagant, sir." He shook his head. "Nothing doing. Mrs. Ferris's counting on that wood for cooking to-night's supper. I've got to hustle. Good-by. Thank you, sir."

"Damn," exploded Hale. "All right then, you young mule. You'll go in

PASSING THE TORCH

my car and you'll chop the wood, and then you'll come back, and spend the night—”

“Oh!” The boy jumped at the words. “Oh, gee! In a bed? I'll do that. That'll be great! And I can start back to Wisconsin about six in the morning. What, sir?”

Hale's fist had come down thundering. “You *can't*. You'll chop your wood, you pig-headed, incorruptible, young highbrow of a—of a quaint, blessed child—” The deep voice broke into a note half laugh and half sob. “You'll go out in my Pierce-Arrow sedan and chop wood for some little clerk in the suburbs, because you—you're a gentleman of your word. But you'll *not* go back to Wisconsin, now or ever. Understand that. You're mine. I wouldn't swap you

PASSING THE TORCH

now for all the Ford millions. Millions!" He laughed harshly. "There isn't any wealth or joy or honor on earth big enough to buy you from me now, you young—rapscallion of a—pious little prig. Do you know that?"

"Huh!" The boy's look was troubled. "I don't just get you, sir. But I've sure gotter go back to Wisconsin. To-morrow or next day. Maybe I *could* stay till Thursday. If I can earn money enough for a ticket to—"

Hale lifted the bony fingers to his cheek; held them there a second. "You little, starved, beloved scarecrow—listen. You—are—my child. Can't you get it? I'll settle with your mother. I'll satisfy her. And you are to stay with me, boy—dear boy—and

PASSING THE TORCH

have everything life can offer. You're *not* to go back to Wisconsin ever. You're mine." Huskily he said it.

Suddenly in the back of his collar a cold claw made him jump. Chilly fingers—the boy had put an arm softly around his neck, and had him firmly by the collar. Hale gazed up speechless. Heaven. Somebody his own. Love. Life. A door opened to eternity. Words like this were not formed in his dizzy, happy brain, but words like this are nearest to what swam there. And the boy spoke with his pretty deliberateness of manner, his clear, low voice.

"Gee! I'd love to stay. I'd love to live with you. You're splendorer than I thought," the boy said. "But, darn it, I can't. Mr. Hotchkiss is saving the job."

PASSING THE TORCH

“What?” Hale roared, but the chilly claw on the back of his neck did not stir. This boy did not frighten easily. “What job? What are you talking about?” roared Hale.

“Mr. Hotchkiss, the groceryman,” explained the lad painstakingly, and Hale trembled to feel the claw move and fingers patting him gently on the shoulder. Patting—*him!* “You see, Mr. Hotchkiss’s clerk left to go into the other shop, Dunham & Hickey’s, where they pay bigger wages. So Mr. Hotchkiss said I could try the place and if I made good he’d give me half what Tom got, and I could sleep in the shop and he’d feed me. It’s a pretty good chance for me, sir,” the boy spoke with pride, “and I’ll make good. And I told Mr. Hotchkiss I had to come here first, so he’s keeping the

PASSING THE TORCH

place till I get back. It's awfully kind of him, you see, and I can't disappoint him. Grandmother said I *must* keep my words."

Hale opened his mouth to thunder again, and changed his mind. "Look here, boy—what the devil do they call you, anyhow?"

"Grandmother called me Freddy."

"Look here, Freddy, I can fix this deal with Mr. Hotchkiss so he'll be satisfied, so he'll be delighted. I'll keep you and send him a letter and a check for one thousand dollars. What would you say to that?"

"One—thous—dol—!" The ends of the words died into gasps; the light-filled gray eyes were globes of amazement. "Why—why, of course Mr. Hotchkiss would rather have all

PASSING THE TORCH

that money than me. I should say!
And Jim Stanton's crazy for the job;
he could take Jim. But—but then
how'd he know I hadn't broken my
word? I don't see—'zactly how I can
disappoint Mr. Hotchkiss, sir. I'm
afraid I gotter—"

"Listen," reasoned Hale, and he
laughed. "Listen — Freddy. What
about my talents? You're needed
here to look after that, to see that I
don't bury them."

"Oh, you won't now, sir," the lad
spoke confidently. "Not after you
know. You're not that sort."

"Yes, I am. Yes, I'll bury them if
you don't stay," Hale argued.

"But I've to keep my word to Mr.
Hotchkiss."

"Listen then. You and I will go out
to Wisconsin. I need a trip. And we'll

PASSING THE TORCH

put it to Mr. Hotchkiss which he'd rather have, you or the check for a thousand dollars. And if he takes the check you'll come back with me. How's that?" The boy considered.

"Well," he agreed at length, "if Mr. Hotchkiss says so that would be all right. But—" he reflected, "one—thousand—dollars!" He turned a quick glance down on the face which gazed up at him, the lined, stern face, aglow. He spoke anxiously, with a manner of protection. "Are you sure you can afford it?"

Hale's mouth shut like a vise. At sixty-eight one must not show doddering sentimentality. "Well," he returned, and his eyes gleamed, "if I economize on your clothes a bit I think I can manage. Do you believe

PASSING THE TORCH

you could go without any new shoes this winter?" Freddy, moving in front of Hale, lifted up a lump of discolored and broken leather and a smile shone. "No, *sir*," said Freddy firmly. "But—" He cocked his head with a manner of grave independence which he had. "But, you know, I can earn those. Yes. And some clothes, I think. This coat is pretty warm." He stretched it around him. "Mr. Hotchkiss gave me this coat. But if I'm going to be with a gentleman like you I'll need new clothes. I'll earn 'em. I'm used to taking care of myself."

Hale spoke uncertainly. "Your job's going to change, young person," he spoke. "From now on you're not to take care of yourself. You're to—take care of me. Understand?"

Slowly, as if a strong, irresistible en-

PASSING THE TORCH

gine were tied to him, the lad, wondering, felt himself pulled around the corner of the stuffed chair, and then, to his amazement, in a flash he, the tall twelve-year-old, was swept into powerful arms and crushed deep into wide shoulders. His face was lost on a tweed surface; he heard something somewhere thumping, and he thought it was a heart; with that, without volition it seemed, his shabby old coat-sleeve flew up and gripped around the grizzled, big head. Oh! He hadn't minded being tired and hungry and footsore and lonely till this minute. But this minute the high courage, which had never before hesitated, broke under happiness. It was so good. To have somebody. One's own. Who cared. It was good not to have to plan. About supper. And a

PASSING THE TORCH

place to sleep. A warm, kind world and a right to a corner in it. To belong to splendid Frederick Hope Hale. Always, all his little life, a distant star of glory. And behold Freddy the waif, the sleeper in garages, held tight in the great arms.

He was an exhausted and faint little shabby boy, and he so let himself go in the joy of that overwhelming embrace that for a minute, two minutes, he was close to unconsciousness. The huge office was very quiet; the two figures did not stir; the boy's thin legs stuck out, and a bit of loose leather, stiff with mud, lay across the man's polished russet shoe. There was nothing in the world but that embrace and the joy in which it folded them. The clock ticked. Measured voices in the outer office spoke and

PASSING THE TORCH

were silent; commonplace and routine, and within a few feet this drama. The clock ticked.

Suddenly the boy shot up straight. "By gosh," he cried. "The wood."

And Hale laughed and laughed. "By gosh," he repeated happily. "Now we've got to hustle. But it's a big car, Freddy, your and my Pierce-Arrow, and Jarvis will be tickled to let it out for 187th Street. We'll make it. I'll chop, too, if necessary. But you'll have to let me telephone one message first." He had the receiver off. "Get me Mr. Latham. Hurry." Receiver to his ear, he stood staring at the boy, and the boy controlled his impatience. "Yes. This you, Dick? You may count on that fifty-thousand-dollar check you need. What? Yes. Oh, that's all right. Glad to do

PASSING THE TORCH

it. Yes. What's happened?" Silence while one could count five. "Well, something *has* happened." His voice hesitated; then came in short flights of words. "Yes—a child— Abraham Lincoln— Passing the torch— Common honesty, you see—to—pass the torch." A pause; Hale again furiously: "You don't understand? Almighty slow, I think you are. I've lost my grip—the hell you say! Listen, Dick, could you stop in to-night on your way to the club? I want to introduce my grandson, Frederick Hope Hale 2d. Brock's son. Yes. I think you'll like him." Hale chuckled. "It doesn't matter one damn how it happened. It's so. You'll understand when you see—my boy." He hung up the receiver and whirled like a lad to the lad. "Look here, Freddy, don't you

PASSING THE TORCH

keep me waiting any longer. I won't stand for it. Hustle, you young devil, hustle. You and I have got to chop wood for Mr. Ferris."

12-7
tx

